

BASIC STEPS IN STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH DAKOTA



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INTRODUCTION

As the world evolves into a global economy that is increasingly driven by technology and information, the communities of North Dakota need to determine what their future will be and how they will achieve it. The former dependence on agriculture and natural resources is not likely to generate the necessary income and tax revenues to sustain rural North Dakota. Many communities are losing population and are faced with fewer taxpayers to pay for the maintenance of the existing infrastructure.

There are no easy answers to this dilemma. Building and sustaining an economically healthy community with a desirable quality of life will require innovative thinking and new attitudes. Solutions will need to be developed through collaborative approaches that involve an expanding leadership base and a more enlightened citizenry.

Community development is an act of midwifery – of a community giving birth to its future. The process engages an entire community in the important process of planning and working to achieve its desired future. The strategic visioning component focuses on these key questions:

- ☞ Where are we now?
- ☞ Where do we want to be?
- ☞ How do we get there?

The result is a simple but powerful process that honors the past, assesses the present, and stimulates our minds to describe our desired future. It then moves us quickly to action projects that will shape that future. This process is known as strategic planning.

The strategic plan is a useful tool for any community that wishes to change and grow. A plan will help you see where you want to go and help you make decisions on how to get there. You will create a vision of what you want your community to be like in the future; identify things that are preventing change and opportunities to move forward; and you will decide what actions are needed to make your vision a reality.

This development process is driven by community leaders – those of you willing to take responsibility – and your desires, aspirations, and dreams for your community. Outside experts can play a useful role, but only a process driven and owned by the citizens and leaders of your community will succeed. The following document outlines a simplified step-by-step approach to implementing this planning process. It is designed to assist local leadership in moving effectively toward a completed strategic plan. A complementary document is available that explains in much more detail the nature of this process.

This process describes an overall community development process (an approach of community involvement) with a strategic visioning component. In the field of community development, communities use a variety of development approaches. Strategic visioning has unique advantages in its ability to engage the community in visualizing its desired future and work to bring about that future.

This process is quite flexible: it can be used to address a single issue, an entire community,

or a larger area. You can also spend a great deal of time doing research for each step of the process, or you can move through it more quickly, relying solely on the expertise and experience of your particular group. The process involves the following steps.

1. Beginning the Strategic Planning Process (1 month)

Who is involved

- ☐ Local community leader or small group of key leaders
- ☐ Division of Community Services
- ☐ Facilitator
- ☐ Other _____

Tasks to be accomplished

- ☐ Determine if key community leaders should conduct the strategic planning process or if outside assistance should be engaged (DCS Resource Teams & Facilitators).

Your community has now determined that it is time to start planning for the future. First contact is the Division of Community Services Point of Contact (POC) to get an explanation of the process.

Your community can be assigned a Community Strategic Planning Facilitator. If you choose outside assistance, a trained facilitators could be a representative from Regional Planning Council, Regional Community Housing Development Organization or other persons trained in this strategic planning process. The community will always choose its own direction.

- ☐ Appoint a coordinator

The coordinator is responsible to see the strategic planning process through from the beginning to the implementation stage. The coordinator will make sure that all steps of the process have been completed and prepare for the next step. He/she will also be the primary contact to work with the facilitator, steering committee and resource teams.

- ☐ Identify stakeholders

Stakeholders are the key leadership of the community who have a strong interest in its development. Although the involvement of a number of community leaders may add complexity and time to the planning process, the ultimate effectiveness of the plan in making significant changes in the community depends on the buy-in, support, and understanding of this leadership.

- ☐ Establish a steering committee

This committee will provide oversight to the planning throughout the process. It is their role to ensure that local needs are met and that the process moves forward smoothly. This committee should also raise any necessary funding for the planning process, establishing key policies, authorizing expenditures and monitoring and evaluation progress.

- ☐ Survey key leaders

Page 4 of the Community Leaders Manual

Before Next Step

- ☐ Assign responsibilities for survey work in next task

2. Assessing Your Community Situation (1 – 2 months)

Who is involved

- ☐ Coordinator and steering committee members
- ☐ Other _____

Tasks to be accomplished

- ☐ Conduct leadership perception survey (Page 7 of the Community Leaders Manual)
- ☐ Conduct public perception survey (Page 13 of the Community Leaders Manual)
- ☐ Conduct business investor assessment (Page 16 of the Community Leaders Manual)
- ☐ Conduct an economic base analysis and S.W.O.T analysis (optional on pages 18 & 19 of the Community Leaders Manual)
- ☐ Put together a community profile
(www.sdc.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/house/index.htm
“Sharp” web site that can assist in putting together a community profile)

Before Next Step

- ☐ Compile and tabulate the data from surveys

3. Leadership Workshop (1 day)

Who is involved

- ☐ Coordinator
- ☐ Facilitator
- ☐ All stakeholders
- ☐ Other _____

Tasks to be accomplished (see sample agenda on page 21 of the Community Leaders Manual)

- ☐ Explanation of the process
- ☐ Explanation of the results of the surveys and local trends
- ☐ Explanation of the “core” elements

Core elements express what is important to the community and help ensure that the participants are all of one accord as they reach out to involve the community in planning for its future. This plan requires that four core elements (housing, public infrastructure, economic development and public services) must be addressed. In addressing core elements the needs relating to all incomes, minorities, disabled and other special needs should be addressed.

- ☐ Development a Community Vision
- ☐ Prioritization of key development issues

Before Next Step

- ☐ Assign a Chair for each Strategic Action Team
- ☐ Determine if any additional members are needed to join the Strategic Action Teams
- ☐ Put together Strategic Action Team materials for next step

4. Strategic Action Planning (2 months)

Who is involved

- ☐ Coordinator
- ☐ Facilitator
- ☐ Strategic Action Chairs (one for each priority issue)
- ☐ Strategic Action Teams (one for each priority issue)
- ☐ Resource Teams (when necessary)
- ☐ Other _____

Tasks to be accomplished

Each Strategic Action Teams should set a series of meetings over the next 6 to 8 weeks to complete the following tasks.

- ☐ Clarify the problem in each action item
- ☐ Determine the causes for each action item
- ☐ Formulate actions to address each cause for each action item
- ☐ Set forth an implementation strategy for each action item

Before Next Step

- ☐ Have steering committee review results from the Action Teams
- ☐ The Teams need to complete their tasks following the guidelines provided, which will result in the basic strategic action plan

(See pages 37 – 42 of the Community Leaders Manual)

5. Strategic Plan Draft (1 month)

Who is involved

- ☐ Coordinator
- ☐ Steering Committee
- ☐ Other _____

Tasks to be accomplished

- ☐ Convert key issues into goals
- ☐ Edit strategic actions for consistency and clarity
- ☐ Circulate draft to all steering committee members for input
- ☐ Make appropriate changes to the draft
- ☐ Develop an executive summary of the strategic action plan and make it available to the public
- ☐ Hold public meetings on the plan
- ☐ Have local government adopt the plan
- ☐ Submit final adopted plan to the Division of Community Services

Before Next Step

- ☐ Develop an implementation process to ensure that the plan is carried out

6. Implementation of the Plan (On going)

Who is involved

- ☐ Coordinator
- ☐ Designated organizations
- ☐ Steering Committee
- ☐ Other _____

Tasks to be accomplished

- ☐ Give steering committee members assignments

Steering committee members should annually meet with representatives of the local organizations who were assigned the responsibility for implementing certain actions.

- ☐ Local organizations should incorporate the appropriate strategic actions into their work plans
- ☐ Monitor and Coordinate the implementation

The steering committee should establish task forces along the lines of the Strategic Action Teams to monitor and coordinate the implementation of their portion of the strategic plan.

Before Next Step

- ☐ Annually monitor the progress of the plan
- ☐ Steering Committee should prepare annual progress reports for the local government on the progress
- ☐ Annually determine if step 1 should begin again

